

# THE DASARA IN MYSORE

ITS ORIGIN AND SIGNIFICANCE

BY

C. HAYAVADANA RAO, B.A., B.L.

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HIS HIGHNESS SRI KRISHNARAJA WADIYAR BAHADUR, G.C.S.I.  
MAHARAJA OF MYSORE

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## PREFACE.

THE object of this volume is to give a plain and clear account of the Dasara festival as it is celebrated in Mysore. Apart from the Royal pageantry with which it is so largely associated in the public eye, this feast has a religious and social significance which deserves to be understood and appreciated. Incidentally, the occasion has been utilized to make known the historical developments it has undergone through the ages and the philosophical interpretation that has been developed in regard to it.

BANGALORE,  
1st October 1935.

C. H.



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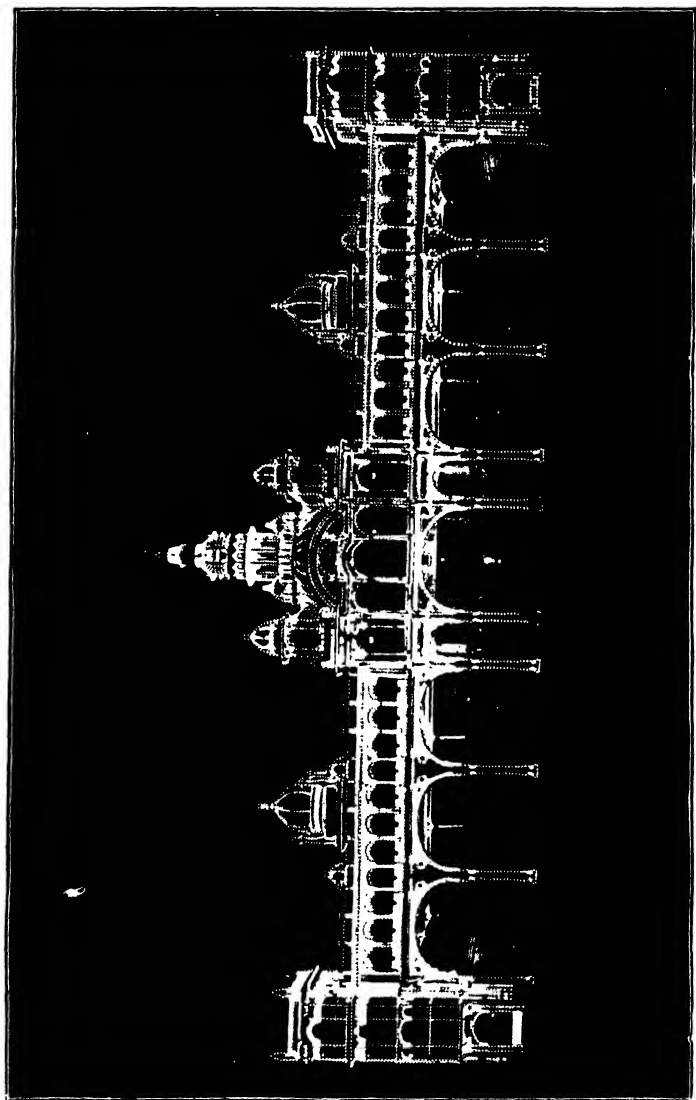


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THE MYSORE PALACE ILLUMINATED FOR DASARA.



# THE DASARA IN MYSORE.

## CHAPTER I.

### The Festival and its Name.

THE *Dasara* festival held in Mysore has a history that goes far back into antiquity. Before detailing the circumstances which have combined to make it so famous, it is necessary to clearly explain the term *Dasara*, and why this festival bears this particular name. *Dasara*, more correctly *Dasahara*, means the tenth day (from Sanskrit *Dasa*, ten and *ahan*, a day, more especially a sacrificial or festival day).<sup>1</sup> The tenth day commemorated in the name is the day which concludes the *nine nights*' feast called *Navaratri*. The *Dasara* day, accordingly, is the day which completes the *nine nights* of worship, prayer and devotion which are kept up on the occasion of the *Navaratri* feast. The festival of *Dasara*, it is needful to add, falls on the tenth day of the bright fortnight of Asvina (*Asvayuja Suddha*), the first nine days of that month being the nine days forming the *Navaratri* festival. These nine days are held sacred to Durga, while the tenth day—*Dasara*—is devoted to the concluding feast in honour of the same Goddess.

<sup>1</sup> The word *ahan* at the beginning of a compound changes into *ah*, *aham* or *ahna* and at the end of a compound into *aham* or *ahar*.

## THE DASARA IN MYSORE

Monier Williams in his *Sanskrit-English Dictionary* gives the following under the word *Dasahara*: “Taking away the ten sins, the Ganga; a festival in honour of the Ganga (on the 10th of Jyaishttha; now held in honour of Durga in the month of Asvin).” This seems a mixing up of what are two independent festivals which are both in vogue to-day; one in honour of the Ganga, which is *still* celebrated on the tenth day of *Jyaishttha*, corresponding to May—June; and the other in honour of Durga, which is celebrated in *Asvin* (September—October). The festival in honour of the *Ganga* is a *local* festival limited to the parts of the country through which the Ganges flows, while that in honour of *Durga* is an All-India festival, celebrated everywhere in it.

The festival of *Dasara* is thus closely connected with that of *Navaratri*, being in fact the tenth and last day following it. The whole period of ten days is therefore called the *Dasara*, the first nine days being collectively styled the *Navaratri*, or *the nine nights*, during which the main religious ceremonies in honour of the goddess Durga, to whom the whole period is dedicated, are performed. These ceremonies can be carried out and are actually performed only *after nightfall* each day. It is on account of this fact that the festival is called *Navaratri*, or *the nine nights*.

It follows from the above that the *Navaratri* and the *Dasara* form one continuous feast of ten days, dedicated to the worship of Durga, and falling on the first ten days of the month of Asvina. The *Dasara*



HIS HIGHNESS THE MAHARAJA ON THE DASARA THRONE



### THE FESTIVAL AND ITS NAME

day concludes the *Navaratri* worship and as it falls on the tenth day of the feast and is celebrated on the tenth day of the month of Asvina also, it seems rightly designated the *tenth-day feast*, just as *Navaratri* is the *nine-nights* fast. The fast of nine days ends with the feast celebrated on the tenth day. Hence the whole feast including nine days of the *Navaratri* and the *Dasara* day are commonly known as the *Dasara*, the feast of ten days, its first and last days being the *Asvayuja Suddha* 1 and *Asvayuja Suddha* 10.

The festival, as will be shown below, is sacred not only to Durga but also to Vishnu, her brother, and is generally observed by the generality of Hindus. An important point to note about it is that, apart from the social and political features that developed in connection with it during later days, especially during the Vijayanagar period of Hindu History in the South of India, it is essentially a religious festival, and enjoined as a duty to be performed by kings and subjects alike. Religious texts prescribe the observance of at least two *Navaratri* festivals annually, each extending to nine days, the first in the Vasanta-kala (Spring), which extends from the middle of March to the middle of May, and the second in the Sharat-kala (Autumn) which extends from the middle of September to the middle of November. The earlier of these is usually celebrated as Ramanavami (or Rama Navaratri), in commemoration of the anniversary of the birthday of Sri Rama, the epic hero; and the later one is called Durga-

Navaratri or Sharannavaratri (or the Naravatri of the Sharat-kala).<sup>2</sup> This is dedicated to the worship of Durga or to her brother Vishnu, the Goddess of energy or the God of prosperity. It is said that these two "nine-day" festivals are held, one at the dawn of Summer and the other at the commencement of Winter, to ward off the evils resulting from the sickness which usually prevails during these two seasons of the year. These seasons are termed by the orthodox as *Yamadamshtakala*,<sup>3</sup> periods of time during which people are peculiarly prone to fall ill and suffer evil consequences therefrom. To ward off such evil consequences, both Kings and their subjects are called upon to perform certain propitiatory ceremonies to the Goddess Durga or to God Vishnu, as the case may be, according to individual choice, and observe in connection with them certain rules and practices. It is suggested that the proper carrying out of the prescribed rites and ceremonies is calculated to ensure protection to the public against the baneful effects of the diseases prevalent during the seasons referred to and to bring

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<sup>2</sup> Corrupted into *Sharada-kala*, the festival being also described as *Sharada-navaratri*, the *navaratri* of the autumn, or the *navaratri* during which Durga is worshipped as *Sharada*, *Sharada* being an *śrī* name for both Durga and *Sarasvati*, a manifestation of Durga herself.

<sup>3</sup> From *Yamadamshttra*, which means Yama's tooth, or jaws of death, the idea being that during these two periods of time people are particularly liable to sickness leading to fatal results. *Yamadamshttra* (*pl.*) signifies the last eight days of *Āśvini* and the whole of *Kartika*, the entire period being regarded as a period of sickness. See Apte, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary* under *Yamadamshttra*.



DURGA-DEVI AS MAHISHASI-RAMARDINI IN KAPPE-CHENNIGARAYA TEMPLE, BELUR.





in prosperity to the performers and augment their powers for good. Why Durga or Vishnu alone of the deities should be worshipped during these periods of religious worship is also worth noting. As Yama is the deity that demands heavy toll from human beings during these cycles of general sickness, he is to be met by deities equally, if not more, powerful than he. Durga is one such ; for she is known as *Yama-svamu* ; and Vishnu is another ; for he is known as *Yama-ari* and *Yama-ripu*. The very thought of these deities is, it is said, enough to put Yama on his heels from the places where these deities hold sway. That is the reason why they are specially invoked and why they are particularly worshipped for a continuous period of nine days. As regards the number of days during which the festival lasts, it may contract to 8 days or become 10 days, according to the exigencies of the Hindu Calendar. But the festival starts, whether in the Spring or in the Autumn, on the day following a Lunar New Year's Day and continues for nine days—upto a *Navami*—and concludes with a feast on the tenth (or *Dasami*) day. Of the several special *Navamis*<sup>4</sup> occurring, the biggest and the most important is the *Navami* that falls in the *Dasara* which comes off in the Autumn. It is called the *Maharnavami* (or *the Great Navami*).

The festival was probably in early days connected

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<sup>4</sup> Among the more important *Navamis* are the following :—*Ramanavami*, which comes off in the month of Chaitra (April-May) ; *Narasimhanavami*, which falls in Vaisakha (May-June) ; and *Maharnavami* in Asvayuja (September-October)

with Indra, the greatest of the Vedic Gods, who is spoken off as the friend of Vishnu and in some hymns of the *Rigveda* as the instrument of Vishnu. The worship of Indra was connected with the copious supply of rain at the proper time ; with abundance of harvests ; with the increase of virtue and morality ; with prosperity and happiness for the common people and for those who were above them as their superiors and leaders. When Indra became king, we are told in the *Mahabharata*, "the clouds showered rain copiously. And the dwellers of the world had abundance of harvests and were excellent in disposition. And devoted to the duties of their respective orders were perfectly happy and cheerful." And Indra, we are further informed, "beholding all the creatures of the world happy and cheerful, became himself filled with joy." Some remarkable features of the festival as celebrated to-day in Mysore seem to support its connection with the worship of Indra. The *pūja* offered to the State Horse, the State Elephant, and the State Carriage represents, it is said, the respect due to be paid to Indra's horse (called *Uchchaisravas* which is described as white in colour with a black tail and which, it is said, came forth at the churning of the ocean ; Indra's elephant (the beautiful and victorious *Airavata*), which is said to possess four tusks and to stand at the entrance to *Svarga* ; and Indra's chariot (commonly known as *Devaratha*), which is described as being drawn by 10,000 reddish yellow horses as speedy as the wind and as scattering the



LAKSHMI-DEVI

*P. K. Chatterjee  
(original in the  
Jagann Mohan  
Chitrasala,  
Mysore).*



dark clouds as it cleans the sky and fills all quarters of the heavens with a din like the crash of thunder-clouds and which is adorned with swords, spears and clubs, flashing lightning and thunder-bolts as well as awe-striking serpents. And it is likewise said that the *puja* offered to the Throne has reference to Indra's throne placed in his beautiful, self-moving assembly-hall (*Sabha*) called *Pushkaramalini*, which drives away the weakness of old age, fatigue and fear. Similarly, the *puja* offered to the State Arms is said to symbolize the respect due to the great weapons of Indra: the unsurpassed thunder-bolt (*Vajra*); the bow (*Vijaya*); and his trumpet (*Sankha*). And the respect shown to the State Cow is held to signify, it is said, the veneration due to Indra's cow (*Surabhi*), the divine, beautiful and gentle mother of all cows (*Gavam matah*) who gives milk in which is the strength of all the best things on earth and which becomes nectar (*Amrita*) to those who live on it. Her daughter is said to yield whatever is wished for (*Sarvakamadugha*). She is described as the best of all wishing-cows; as fat to look at and as giving abundance of sweet milk and the mortal who drinks her milk is to be for a thousand years like a strong youth. She is spoken of as possessing a beautiful neck and lovely hoofs and endowed with all virtues. Thus, it is seen, that the King in offering *puja* to these different objects connected with the sovereignty of Indra is returning thanks to him for his invaluable and meritorious services to mankind. Indra was not only a mighty warrior and a great king but also a renowned

benefactor to humanity. He brought down rain for the relief of mankind and his very name is indicative of his greatest function—the bringing down of rain.<sup>5</sup>

In order to appreciate at its true value the services of Indra in controlling rain for the benefit of mankind, we should remember that it is both beneficial and ruinous as it is timely and sufficiently copious or untimely and over-abundant. Indra as Rain-God was needed in this country and indeed so great a need did a deity like him become that in later times we see this feature of his powers—the capacity to send rain to earth—was detached from him and made an independent deity under the name of Parjanya.<sup>6</sup> We have ample evidence, from the most ancient to modern times, both of the rain's power and violence and of its utility and blessing for the soil, when the land is parched by the burning heat of the Sun for three whole months.<sup>7</sup> The hot season begins about the middle of March—just past Mahasivaratri feast—and lasts till about the middle of June, by the end of that time man and beast and the vegetation around them languish and die.<sup>8</sup> When the heat reaches its highest point, dark clouds appear on the horizon, then there fall a few refreshing

<sup>5</sup> The word Indra is derived from *Indu*, a drop.

<sup>6</sup> See Fausboll, *Indian Mythology*, 82.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 93-96.

<sup>8</sup> See Kalidasa, *Ritusamhara* for his masterly description of Grishma and Varsha (Summer and Rainy seasons, the first ranging from the middle of May to the middle of July and the second from the middle of July to the middle of September).



DURGA-D VI AS MAHISHASURAMARDINI

*P. K. Chatterjee  
original in the  
Jagan Mohan  
Chitrasala,  
Mysore).*





## THE FESTIVAL AND ITS NAME

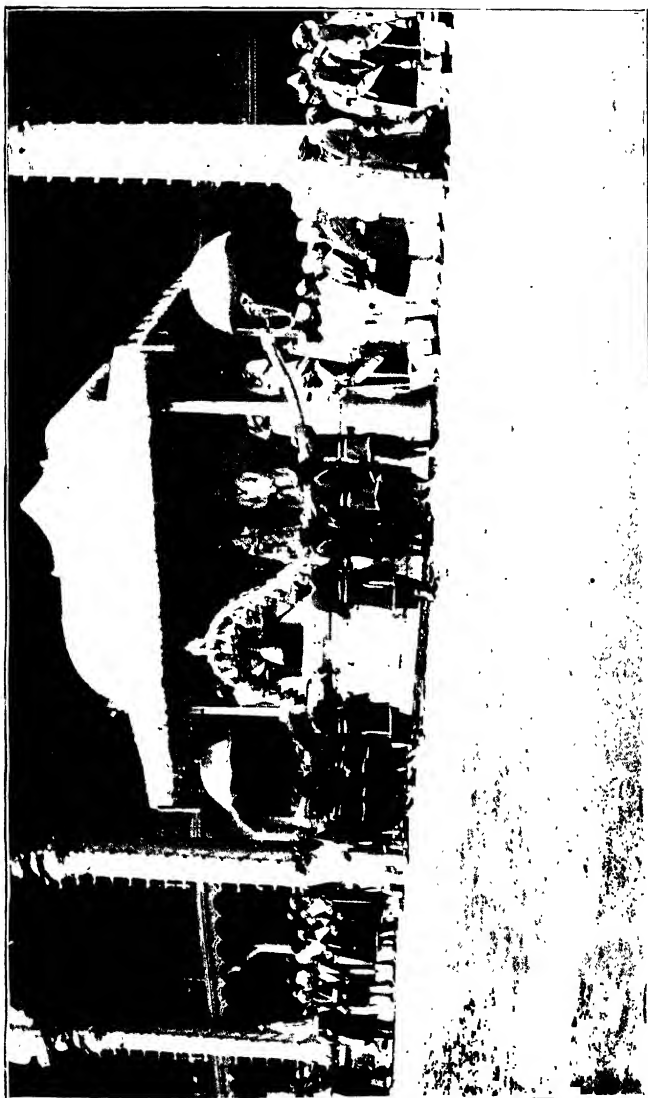
drops and finally the thunder-clouds burst with furious and violent crashes ranging with immense might. It seldom lasts more than an hour or two, but the destruction it causes is painfully impressive: uprooted trees and houses levelled with the ground. The hot season is followed by a rainy season in which the swollen rivers wash the trees from the banks and carry them away with them in their violent course. Descriptions of heavy storms and floods of rain abound in the *Mahabharata*. One of these ought to suffice to show the deep impression created by them. "Once while he was in the forest," this account goes, "a violent whirlwind arose which nearly overthrew the trees on all sides. The atmosphere which was full of clouds, was ornamented by a circle of lightning. It was for an instant just like a sea covered with ships and caravans. Satakratu<sup>9</sup> who had begun to rain with a quantity of raindrops filled in an instant the earth with water. Thereupon, at that time, when everything was overwhelmed with water, running about all over the wood, distraught, suffering from cold, with bewildered senses that birdcatcher found neither lowland nor continent (where he might dwell), for his way was filled with water-courses. And the birds of the forest killed by the fury of the rain or dying, and deer, lions and boars, sought the mainland and lay down to rest frightened by the

<sup>9</sup> Indra, Maghavan and Satakratu are special names of India which refer to his having obtained his sovereignty over the celestials through offering sacrifices. He is said to have surpassed all other gods by his sacrifices. See *Mahabharata*, VI. 240; XII. 611.

heavy storm and rain, and tortured by fear and hunger, they wandered about, all together in the wood.”<sup>10</sup> Such is a striking picture of the effects of a thunder-storm as it impressed itself on people in olden days. On the other hand, the want of rain may prove equally impressive. The cultivator may plough the land, prepare the soil, fence the field, get the seeds ready but what can he do unless the Rain-God blesses him ? “ After having broken the earth with the plough-share,” we read in the epic, “ the ploughman sows the seed, (thereupon) he sits in silence, the reason is that he waits for Parjanya ; if the rain does not favour him, is it his fault ? ”<sup>11</sup> That pathetic cry is a familiar one to this day. Indra, who controls rain, cannot but be regarded the bestower of prosperity and as such deserving of praise and worship. In this sense, the *Dasara* celebrated in the Sharat-kala, should be deemed to be a great religious festival coinciding with the end of the rainy season. A festival too, in which the King takes a leading part, and the whole function ends in festivities and amusements—cities gaily decorated, streets packed with eager crowds, processions in which all join, the King showing himself to his subjects in State on a high throne and troops marching past, boasting of their past prowess and future achievements. Such a religious and social function would both be a thanksgiving ceremony for past blessings conferred as for future blessings

<sup>10</sup> *Mahabharata*, XII. 5477.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, III. 1248.



H. H. THE MAHARAJA SENDING THE STATE SWORD TO THE BANNI-MANTAP



## THE FESTIVAL AND ITS NAME

craved for. If seasonable rains fell and proved valuable to man and beast and made domestic and social life pleasant and helped to smoothen relations between King and people, its evil after-effects in the shape of disease and death may also be warded off by all concerned in a universal prayer during a ten-days religious intercession. That seems to be the idea underlying the *Dasara* festival, if the symbolism used in it is any guide to our understanding of it.

## CHAPTER II.

### The Dasara in Mysore.

IN Mysore, the festival has been celebrated from time immemorial, in the most religious manner. The ruler may be rightly said to have set the example in this connection to his subjects. The ceremony as observed in Mysore follows the injunctions laid down in the various sacred texts bearing on the subject. These, it may be stated, are mostly found in the *Devi-Bhagavata* and a number of *Puranas* among which may be included the *Padma-Purana*, the *Bharishyottara-Purana*, the *Matsya-Purana*, the *Saura-Purana* and the *Nirnaya-Sindhu*. According to the ordinances prescribed in these different sacred writings, a fine level piece of ground is selected slightly in anticipation of the festival, and it is well swept and cleaned. Its ground area is washed with fine cow-dung mixed with white earth. On this ground, a roofed enclosure, usually called a *Mantap*, about 24 feet square, is erected with pillars supporting it. This *mantap* is provided with a ceiling inside and decorated all round with festoons and flags. About its centre a *dais*, about 2 feet square, is put up, its sides daubed with white-wash. On the *dais* is installed a well-dressed and well-decked image of the Goddess Durga on a seat with the *Simha-lanchhana* (lion symbol) on it. The Goddess thus set up is ordinarily invested with four hands one holding the *Sankha* (conch),



HIS HIGHNESS THE MAHARAJA WORSHIPPING THE STATE ELEPHANT.



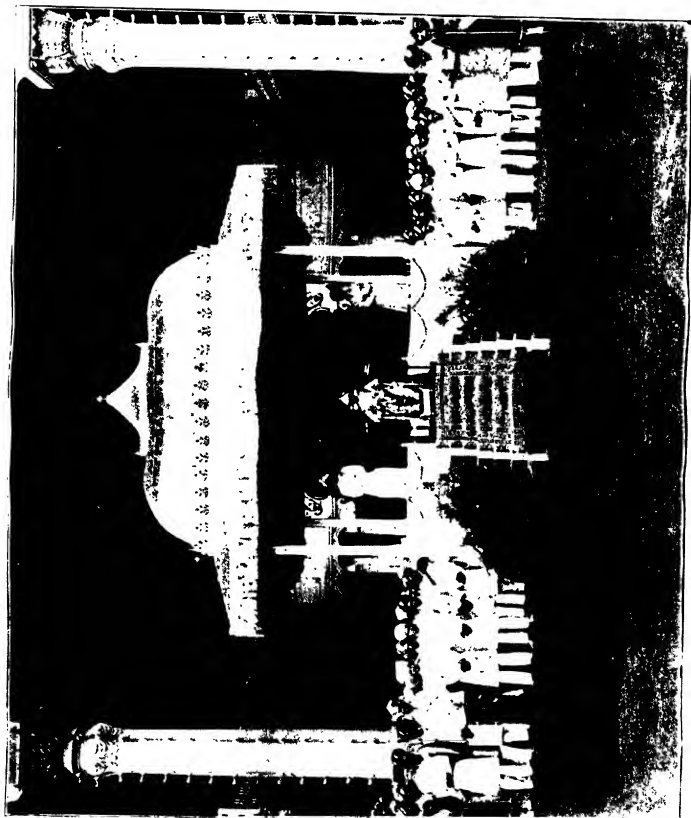


another the *Chakra* (discus), a third the *Gada* (mace), and the fourth the *Padma* (lotus). Sometimes, when an image is not thus installed, the *Srichakra*<sup>1</sup> is substituted for it and placed in the spot where the image would have been installed. Slightly to the south-east of the *dais* is put up a sacrificial pit—called the *Homakunda*—which is triangular in shape.<sup>2</sup> At the appointed hour, the Brahmans invited for the occasion, who are usually among those well-versed in the *Devi-tattva*, which include all that relating to the worship in due form of *Sakti* (or Creative Energy), assemble at the *Homakunda* and round about it and the formal *pūjā* begins. First, Ganesa, the God of wisdom and the remover of obstacles, is invoked and worshipped. Then the person undertaking the *homa* is invested with the vow of performance (*dīkṣha*). Then the Goddess Durgā is invoked and *pūjā* offered to her, the person undertaking it leading, the assembled

*Srichakra* literally signifies "the holy circle of the earth," which represents the whole created universe. The Goddess Durgā is supposed to control the entire world and is accordingly represented by a circular emblem (drawn on a piece of metal, gold, silver or copper) containing the *navamāsa* (or the nine points of the compass), four of which represent the *Purusha* (the Supreme Soul of the universe) and the remaining five the *Prakṛti* (the ultimate subtlest matter that goes to make up the universe). It is worthy of note in view of the connection of this festival with Indra in olden days, that *Srichakra* also signifies a wheel of Indra's car (which he rode to bring down rain). See Appendix II for further information on this head.

<sup>2</sup> Literally a *homakunda* signifies a hole in the ground for receiving the consecrated fire. The place where it is set up is technically called the *homa-sala*, a sacrificial hall or chamber.

Brahman priests chanting all the while texts from the *Vedas* and *Puranas* and feeding the sacrificial pit with libations of ghee, etc. The *homa* goes on for the nine days the festival lasts, the period of nine days being, for the purpose, divided into three sub-periods of three days each, each sub-period being devoted to the propitiation of one aspect of the Devi. Thus, during the first sub-period the Goddess is propitiated in her manifestation of Mahakali—for obtaining immunity from diseases, poverty and grief; in the second, she is worshipped in her *avatar* of Mahalakshmi—for securing wealth, happiness and prosperity; and in the third, *pūja* is offered to her in her incarnation of Mahasarasvati—to obtain purity of mind, intellectual eminence and spiritual bliss. These three manifestations of the Devi—in each of which she blessed humanity—are respectively known as *Saiva Sakti* (or *Maheśvari*), *Vaishnavi* and *Brahmi* (or *Brahmani*). The ninth day ceremony at the *Homakunda* is termed the *Chandi-homa*, which is a special offering of libations in honour of the Goddess in her manifestation as *Chandi*. This particular *homa* over, the *diksha* (the consecration for its due performance) ends. The person invested with the *diksha* removes the silken thread from off his right wrist and regains his liberty for leading his ordinary life, he being during the period unable to move out or in any way rendered impure in thought, word or deed. The tenth day is marked by a feast, and ends generally in a grand procession through decorated streets and the worship of the Banni tree. In this procession, not



HIS HIGHNESS THE MAHARAJA WATCHING THE WRESTLERS.



only the image of the Devi or the *Srichakra* as the case may be that was installed before the sacrificial pit but also other like images to which during the same period of nine days, special *pujas* had been offered in the various temples and shrines and in the families of householders, are carried to the nearest Banni tree in the town or village concerned, and after the waving of *mangalaratis* (of lighted camphor) invoking the blessings on all of the Devi, they are brought back in procession to their starting point and there the crowds disperse to their homes.

As forming part of the ceremonial of the nine days, the Devi is propitiated by a feeding of a selected number of healthy female children, who are chosen with care as they should be of good physique and free from deformities and diseases of any kind. The number to be fed daily depends on the capacity of the performer of the rite. But, whatever the number chosen on the first day it should go on increasing by one every day. Thus, if two female children are fed on the first day, three have to be fed on the second ; four on the third ; five on the fourth and so on ending with ten on the ninth day. A female child of two years, if chosen, is said to symbolise *Kumarika* and is intended to ward off diseases ; one of three years, *Trimurthi*, to obtain victory over one's enemies ; one of four years, *Kalyani* ; one of five, *Rohini* ; of six, *Kalika* ; of seven, *Chandi* ; of eight, *Sambhavi* ; and of nine, *Durga*, to drive off all evil and calamitous influences and to secure health, wealth and prosperity. It is said that young female

children are chosen in this manner and fed during the currency of the nine days' *diksha*, because it is believed that in such juvenile innocence, the pure spirit of the Goddess, the Divine Motherhood, is believed to be best manifest.

The worship of the Devi during the feast is ordained for all Hindu castes and creeds. Every family head celebrates it piously and religiously. Some employ competent priests to perform it on their behalf. As it is generally intended to ward off evil and secure immunity from sickness of every kind—including sudden calamities engendered by outbreaks of infectious and other diseases, the festival is universally popular. Brahman priests observe it scrupulously throughout the whole period, particularly those who have performed sacrifices already. One object is personal to themselves and another is general. They, as priests, are required to pray for all—for the general happiness of all fellow-citizens, for the country and for the King. *Sarve janah sukhino bhavantu*, as the fine phrase goes. They not only pray for their well-being and prosperity but also for the well-being and prosperity of the country in which and the people amidst whom they live and for the well-being and prosperity of the King under whose benign rule they thrive and carry on their avocations. To Kings and Kshatriyas generally, the observance of the feast is imperiously ordained because to them it means not only the performance of ceremonies intended to secure freedom from illness of every kind and general prosperity to themselves and their families but also the insuring of

victory in their martial enterprises. Also, the preservation of their skill in the use of weapons and the unimpaired maintenance of their martial characteristics.

The ritual in domestic households and temples does not vary. In the leading *Mutts*, presided over by *Gurus* of the *Sanyasin* (ascetic) order also the festival is observed. Sacrificial offerings—by means of a *homa*—are also made by these *Gurus*.

During the nine days, the *Devi-Bhagavatam* is read and expounded. If the household or *Mutt* follows the Vaishnava tradition, the *Venkatesa Mahatmyam* is read in place of the *Devi-Bhagavatam*. The suggestion in this case is that as Durga is the sister of Sri Krishna and is possessed of the *Sakti* of Vishnu as well, she being for this reason, endowed with all his weapons of warfare—the *Sankha*, *Chakra*, etc.,—the reading of the life and doings of the one must mean the reading of the life and doings of the other.

A point specially worthy of note in connection with the festival during its nine days is that the devotees of Siva or Vishnu, as the case may be, offer worship from morning till nightfall, during the whole of which time they keep fasting, only taking light refreshments late in the evening. Complete fasting is disallowed on these days, because such a fast is not associated with the auspicious character of the festival itself. Why the festival should be continued until nightfall is that the worship of Durga can only be after dusk, at the *sandhi* as it is called or the moment of contact between day and night. The *pūja* accordingly is

continued in the night, though it is started earlier and concluded in the night. It is for this reason, *viz.*, that for *nine-nights* the worship is continued and offered to the Goddess, the sacrificial fire being kept up for the purpose throughout the period, the festival as a whole is called *Navaratri* or the nine-nights' festival.

Night is the sister of Dawn and prepares the way for her. Such, at any rate, is the Vedic conception of Night. There is a beautiful hymn in the *Rigveda* which develops this idea and suggests how and why Night gives way to Dawn :—

The divine Night approaching looked upon many places with her eyes, she has assumed all beauties.

The immortal goddess has filled the expanded (firmament), the low places and the high places,<sup>3</sup> she fights the darkness with lustre.

The advancing goddess prepared (the way for) her sister Dawn, and then the darkness departs.

May she be favourable to us to-day upon whose approach we re-enter (our dwellings), as birds (re-enter) their nest upon the tree.

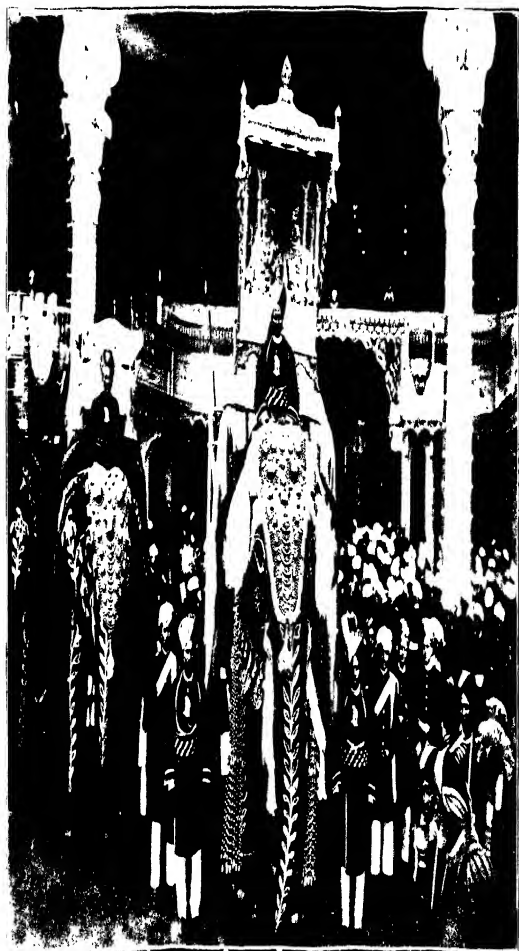
Men have re-entered (their dwellings), and beasts and birds and the swift hawks.

Keep off, O Urmya, the she-wolf, keep off the wolf and the robber, and be safely passed by us.

The all-embracing black diffused darkness has approached me, discharge it, Ushas, as if it were a debt.

<sup>3</sup> Sayana explains the words "low" and "high" as referring to plants; the Night first of all fills things with darkness and then lights up the darkness with the stars, etc.





HIS HIGHNESS THE MAHARAJA STARTING IN PROCESSION TO THE BAYNI MANTAP.



### THE DASARA IN MYSORE

I have brought (these verses) before thee like milch kine; accept, O Night, daughter of the sky, (my oblation) as the eulogy of one about to conquer.<sup>4</sup>

The Night is thus discharged by Dawn and there is victory to the sacrificer. The nine-days' sacrifice and offering of the *pūja* during the nine nights is concluded on the tenth day and there is victory to the devotee of the Devi.

One or two minor, though interesting, points may be noted here. Within the nine days, there are celebrated some special *pūjas*. On the seventh day (*Saptamī*), is celebrated the *Sarasvatī pūja*, a day sacred to the Devi in her incarnation of Mahasarasvatī, the great goddess of learning, representing all arts and sciences. Books, MSS., writing materials, palm leaves, etc., are collected and *pūja* is done to them, they collectively representing the Goddess. On the eighth day (*Durgashtamī*), the Devi is worshipped as a special day devoted to her.<sup>5</sup> On the ninth day (*Mahanavami*), implements and instruments symbolic of the occupations and avocations of the people are collected together and the *Sakti* of Durga present in them is invoked and worshipped. Those of the military class collect

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<sup>4</sup> *Rigveda*, X. 10-15. The deity is the personified Night; the Rishi is Kushika, son of Ratri (Night).

<sup>5</sup> The eighth day of certain lunar fortnights are specially noteworthy as days for the celebration of great anniversaries. Thus the *Janmashtami*, which celebrates the anniversary of Sri Krishna falls on the 8th lunar day in the dark fortnight of Bhādra (Aug.-Sept.). The *Radhashtami*, which commemorates the anniversary of the birthday of Radha, consort of Sri Krishna, falls in Bhādrapada (Sept. Oct.)

their implements before the Devi and offer *pūja* throughout the nine days and most elaborately on the ninth day as her *Sakti* is believed to be in them more especially on that day. On the tenth day, they take them in the procession already mentioned. On the same day all vehicles, including elephants, horses, chariots, cows, etc., are also taken out in procession. One other point worthy of mention is that when the festival continues to the full nine nights, and the *Mulanakshatram* (19th asterism) falls on *Shashthi* or *Saptami*, the special *pūja* for the presiding deity is increased. In those families in which Durga is the family goddess—every family has its own special deity, god or goddess—they offer worship to her during the nine days in a more elaborate manner. As kings and chiefs have for their weapons the very ones wielded by the Devi, they are held to be under her special care and so their devotion to her is the more marked. And it is also held that they rule under the special dispensation and blessings of the Devi. Hence their great regard, it is said, for her during the period this festival lasts.

The day following the sacrificial nine-days' semi-fast is appropriately called the *Dasara* (more correctly *Dasahara*, or *Dasa-ahar* or *Dasa-ahan*) or tenth day, the terms *ahar* and *ahan* indicating a festival day. For the tenth day is really held to be and celebrated as a great festival day. The streets are gaily decorated; a grand procession is organised in which all join; and the whole cavalcade moves with their images, etc.,

and repair to the *Sami* (or *Banni*) tree, in which the Devi resides, and offer their final worship to her and then, obtaining her blessings, return back in procession and disperse to their respective homes. A grand united effort, one would think, on the part of the people to bring in peace and plenty unto themselves and unto their king and country.

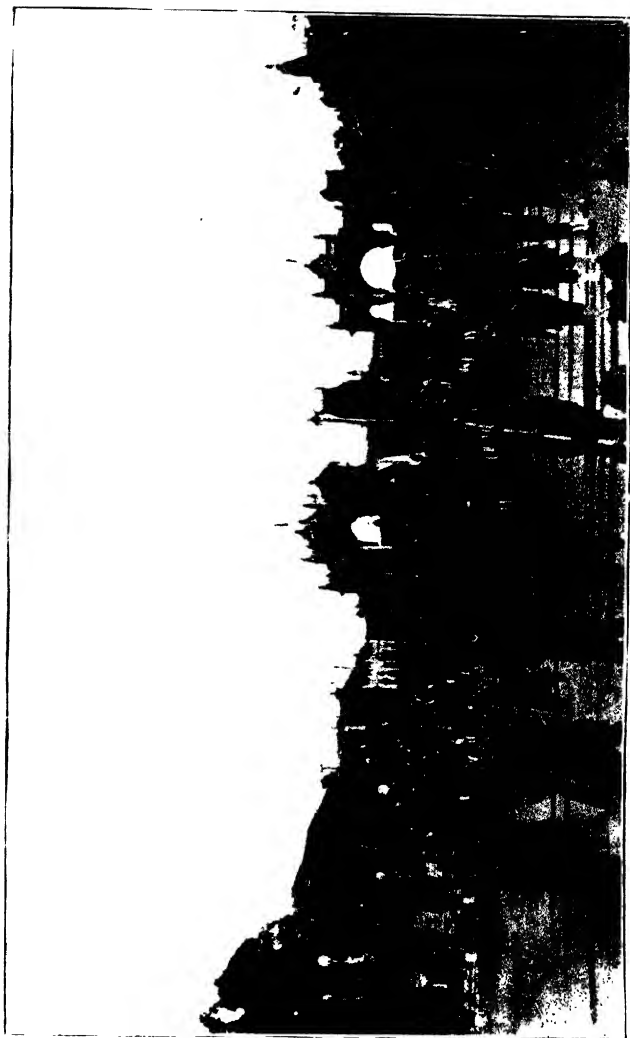
No wonder the popular saying goes *Durga-swargapavarga*, i.e., Durga is the opening of *Svarga*, which means that to the devotee of Durga, beatitude is certain.

In the Mysore Royal Family, the following is the order in which the various events connected with the festival come off :—

On the morning of Asvayuja Suddha 1, after *prarthana* (invocation) offered to the family tutelary deity Sri Chamundesvari, *mangalasnana* (consecrated oil bath) takes place. Next, *pūja* is offered to Ganesa; then follows the *kankanadharana*, or the investing of the silken thread, the same being tied round the wrist of the right hand. This is followed by the *pūja* on the *Sejje*, the Durbar Hall, to the *Naragrahas* (or the nine planets); then, *pūja* to the Royal Throne, and the ceremony of formally mounting on it after passing round it thrice. The State-sword, which is daily worshipped during the nine days in the inner *sanctum* of the Palace, is brought out from there and placed beside His Highness the Maharaja while on the Throne during the Durbar on the *Sejje*. Here the offerings sent by the principal *Mutts* are tendered to His Highness;

these are followed by the honours sent by the different temples; and these again by the presentation by select Brahman priests of consecrated cocoanuts and coloured rice. Then *muzre* and *nazar* are offered by the assembled high State officers led by the Dewan and by prominent citizens and merchants. This over, the assembled State and Household troops fire *feu-de-joie* from the *maidan* below. Next, the State Elephant and the State Horse offer obeisance and retire. The *darbaris* are then garlanded and offered betel and nuts. They then offer *muzre* in batches and quit the Hall. Shortly after royal ladies from the inner apartments enter and soon retire. The *darbaris* next march past, one by one, in regular order, before the Throne and obtain floral gifts at His Highness' hands. His Highness next dismounts from the Throne and retires into the inner *sanctum* in the Palace. Here special worship is offered in Vedic form to Sri Chamundesvari, the family goddess, by day and night, with recitations from the sacred *Puranas* during the whole period of nine days. His Highness takes part in this worship daily with all due reverence. In the evening—of the first day—His Highness holds a Durbar on the *Sejje* at about 7 P.M. After a floral offering, he mounts the Throne and receives *muzre* from the assembled *darbaris*. Wrestling by Jettis and interesting feats of arms, etc., are next witnessed in the *maidan* below, from where the State Elephant and Horse offer due obeisance.

From the second to the eighth day inclusive, the *Sejje* Durbar takes place only in the evenings,



DASARA PROCESSION NEAR THE NORTH FORT GATE.





while all religious ceremonies take place in the inner *sanctum*. On the seventh day, His Highness performs the Sarasvati *puja* in the inner *sanctum*. On the eighth day, known as the Kalaratri, the ceremony of Mahishasuramardini is observed, *i.e.*, the destruction of the demon Mahishasura by the Goddess is celebrated in accordance with the prescribed rites in the night.

On the ninth day comes off the worship of *Ayudhas* or implements of every kind used. Selected Arms and accoutrements, the State Elephant and the State Horse are offered *puja*. Lakshmidēvi, the goddess of wealth, is also worshipped on this day by His Highness. On this day, further, the *Chandi-homam*, a great sacrifice in honour of Chandi, is performed. Immediately this is over, His Highness divests himself of the *kankana*, the silken thread at his right wrist. With this, the vow taken to carry through the celebration is deemed successfully over. In the evening, His Highness is visited by the Hon'ble the Resident in Mysore and other European guests, who join the Durbar and retire after witnessing the wrestling and other amusements in the *maidan* in front of the Palace, which is, by the way, a sea of human faces and a grand sight, resplendent with lights, to behold.

On the morning of the tenth day, called Vijayadasami day, the Day of Victory, immediately after *puja* is offered to the State Arms, they are placed in the State Palanquin and taken in procession to the Banni mantap, His Highness leading the procession,

### THE DASARA IN MYSORE

for a short length, on the State Horse. He returns in a palanquin, and after witnessing the wrestling matches in progress, retires. In the afternoon, at about 4 P.M., the Royal Procession starts from the Palace with His Highness the Maharaja, accompanied by H. H. the Yuvaraja and Prince Jayachamarajendra Wadiyar, mounted on the *ambari* on the procession Elephant and proceeds, through the Bazaar, to the Banni Mantap. There His Highness reviews the assembled troops and offers *pūja* in a special pavilion to the *Sami tree*, hears the Palace genealogical list read out to him by one of the officers attending on the occasion and distributes offerings of consecrated Banni leaves to the assembled officers of State, headed by the Dewan. He then leads back the Royal Arms and having put them in the State Palanquin, mounts on the Elephant again and returns to the Palace. He next holds a short Durbar there and then retires. This concludes the celebration of the festival. During its progress, thousands are fed and special worship is offered in all the temples in Mysore City and the State generally.

In Mysore, the festival has been celebrated from time out of memory. Among the rulers of Mysore, Raja Wodeyar (1578–1617) is said to have drawn up elaborate rules and regulations for its celebration at Seringapatam, which became the capital of the kingdom on its acquisition by him, along with the throne (*Ratna Simhasana*), from the Vijayanagar Viceroy Tirumala in 1610. It attained considerable popularity under Kanthirava Narasaraja Wodeyar I (1638–59 and his successors.

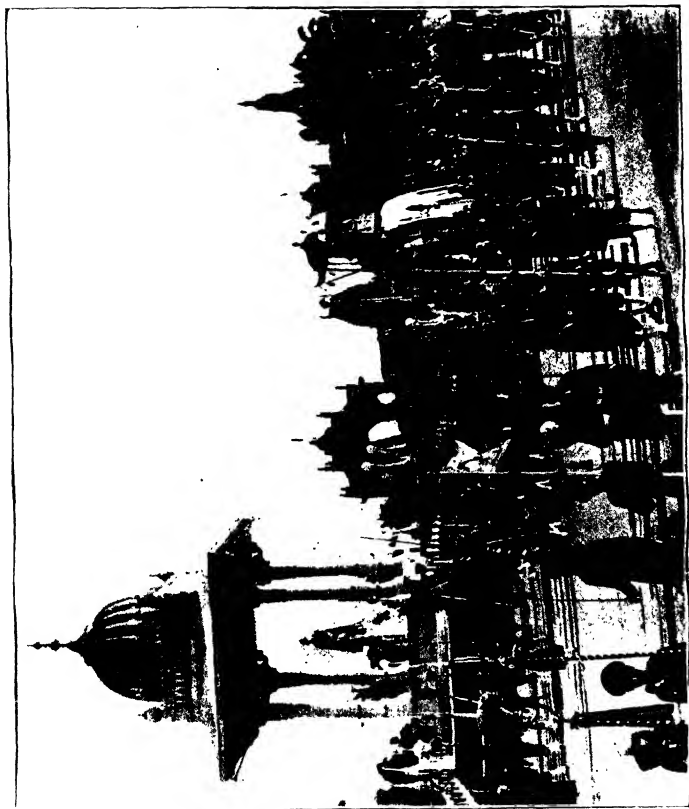
In *Kanthirava Narasaraja Vijayam*, which may be set down to 1648, we have an elaborate and picturesque account of it as celebrated by Kanthirava Narasaraja Wodeyar in 1647,<sup>6</sup> when he was at the height of his power. The account refers, among other details, to the beautification of the capital city, the worship of the nine-fold manifestations of the deity (*Chandika*) in the Royal household, the programme of the king's daily *Durbar* during the nine days and his State Procession on the tenth day (*Vijayadasami*). The festival was observed in Seringapatam even during the period of the usurpation of Haidar and Tipu (1761-99). It was restored to its former brilliance by H. H. Sri Krishnaraja Wodeyar III, on the restoration of the kingdom to him in 1799 and during the present reign has come to be known as the most magnificent festival celebrated in South India.

In 1805, seeing that a number of European ladies and gentlemen were desirous of witnessing the *darbars* held by him on the occasion of the festivities, Krishna Raja Wodeyar III allowed them to attend it. There is some evidence to believe that for some years at least they were free to attend them throughout the period the festival lasted. In or about 1814, a special *Durbar Day* came to be fixed for their attendance and they were allowed to pay their respects to His Highness the Maharaja and receive from him gifts of flowers

<sup>6</sup> Govinda Vaidya, the author of the work, refers to it by the names of *Navaratri* and *Mahanavami*.

taken from under the feet of the Devi. This practice continues to this day and is much esteemed by European visitors during the *Dasara* season.

The social side of the festival has been greatly developed in recent years, especially since His Highness Sri Krishna Raja Wodeyar IV, the present Maharaja, came to the throne. The *Durbars* he holds during this period add to the dignity of the occasion. Their significance is not to be missed. They afford opportunity for king and subject to meet. The time is propitious. Parjanya has blessed ; rain has quickened the growth of crops. Grateful thanks are due to Him and to the king whose virtues have helped to secure that blessing of blessings, for on the timely falling of rain depends the sustenance of humanity. The mutual exchange of amenities between king and subject at the appointed hours and in the appointed manner renders easy the carrying out of that necessary duty and the imparting of the blessing thus obtained by the king to the subject. The homage (*muzre*) that is paid and the tribute (*nazar*) that is tendered to the king help to create mutuality between them and bring them into immediate personal relations. Though seemingly formal—for His Highness gracefully remits the *nazar* tendered—the ceremonial meeting that is thus brought about on this auspicious occasion marks the beginning, for the year, of that loyalty and dutifulness that ought throughout its course to exist between subject and king. His Highness not only blesses from his seat on the Throne—the lion-headed throne—the



ANOTHER VIEW OF DASARA PROCESSION NEAR THE STATUE.



Seat of the Devi, his subjects, but also communicates individually to each of them her tender goodwill towards them by offering a flower that had been placed at her feet whilst he was in communion with her. Thus is the subject brought into touch with the Devi herself, when she has been invoked for the good of all humanity. The further cordiality shown by the presentation of flower garlands and betel and nut, to each *Durbari* add to the dignity of the occasion, while the musical and other performances that take place render it impressive to a degree. The large crowds that gather to witness the *Durbar*, the special arrangements made for them on the occasion, the wonderful display of electric lights which makes every part of the *Durbar Hall* visible from below, the feats performed, the wrestlers, the elephants, the horses and the trained acrobats, and the musical marches performed by the military, all these add to the grandeur of the occasion and make it imperishable in the memories of those who come from far and near to witness the *Durbar* during the ten days the festival lasts.

During some years past, a great Exhibition of industrial products has also been added with the double object of giving a push to trade and industries and to make people acquire the habit of patronising locally manufactured goods. This Exhibition has helped to provide the much-required diversion, on the social side, to the large numbers of visitors who are attracted to Mysore during the *Dasara* season. Apart from this, His Highness the Maharaja very graciously permits, during

this period, visitors to inspect the many objects of interest exhibited within the precincts of the Palace, including perhaps the greatest scenes and display of domestic arts known in India. The immense crowds that go to see these exhibits and display and the gorgeous paintings on the walls of the Palace show their popularity with the masses. The city too, during the season, is one mass of humanity, peaceful and orderly though always on the move, enjoying the sights and the scenery all round. A city like this that is at unity in itself is twice blessed, for it pleases the heart while it satisfies the head.

Well then, I now do plainly see  
The crowd, and buzz and murmurings  
Of this great hive, the city.

That is, Mysore city, in a word, during the *Dasara*—full of people, full of colour, full of movement, and full of merry-making, joy and happiness. It is India's epitome for the time being. And the saying goes that those who have not met for ages are sure to meet each other at Mysore during the *Dasara*.



### CHAPTER III.

#### The Significance of Dasara.

FROM what has been said in the foregoing chapters, it will be seen that the *Dasara* that is celebrated in the month of Asvini is a festival universally observed in India. It is a festival too which is observed by all classes of Hindus, by followers of Vishnu, Siva and Sakti. As a family feast, it occupies a position denied to other feasts known to the Hindu Calendar. But its unique character is more clearly seen when it is realized that religious heads and Royal personages are to observe it with due solemnity during the ten days it lasts not only for their own sake but also for the sake of those committed to their charge. The responsibility resting on Royal personages has been, if anything, even greater, because, of the special duties devolving on them as Rulers over their subjects. A King's duty is to protect his subjects. According to the *Mahabharata*, Kings must exert themselves on behalf of their subjects and see that they are happy and prosperous. Some people, Sri Krishna says in the epic, declare that it is by knowledge that men secure salvation, while others say it is by deeds. His own opinion was that the gods had gained the merit and dignity they possessed through work. The sun never slept and rose every day without fail. The earth carried her great burden unceasingly. The rivers never failed to carry their waters to the sea. It is by work that Indra maintains his great position in heaven. Only the ignorant

think otherwise. A King's duty is to act and to protect his subjects by wise action on his part.<sup>1</sup> Bhishma, the great statesman who figures in the epic, similarly dwells on the duties of Kings and enlarges on the dangers of anarchy and the duties of Kings. Foremost he places before them the need of exertion on their part. Exertion in particular is said to be superior to destiny. Their first duty is to protect their subjects.<sup>2</sup> They can acquire all the blessings required by them—we are told—by the proper observance of their duties. When a King is virtuous, Bhishma declares, the gods themselves are afraid to disobey him, and he certainly deserves to be worshipped as it is on him the prosperity of the world depends. Without his protection, trade and agriculture could not flourish, the evil-doers would not be punished, nor the study of the *Vedas* and asceticism rendered possible. The carrying out of his duties is thus stressed throughout the epic and this includes the carrying out of everything that is needed for securing the prosperity of his subjects. A similar stress on the duties of Kings is laid in the other epic, the *Ramayana*. A King, we are told, is at once father and mother and friend to his subjects.<sup>3</sup> Thus seeking the prosperity and happiness of their subjects is the primary duty of Kings. With this end in view, they have to take all steps necessary to guard the interests of their subjects. The due

<sup>1</sup> *Mahabharata, Udyogaparva*, Sri Krishna's discourse.

<sup>2</sup> *Mahabharata, Santi-parva*, Bhishma's discourse.

<sup>3</sup> *Ramayana, Ayodhya Kanda*.



DASARA PROCESSION NEAR THE STATUE.



performance of rites and rituals is included among these duties. From this point of view, it is expected of Kings that they lead their subjects in the discharge of their respective duties, according to the positions they occupy in society. The Hindu law books make this position clear. Thus, it is said that the King sustains the world; that he guards men (*i.e.*, his subjects); and that he receives one-sixth part of the merits and demerits of his subjects.<sup>4</sup> The King, indeed, is described as the head of society and the protector of religion and in his executive capacity he is held to guide the religious and moral life of the people.<sup>5</sup> No Hindu festival celebrated in India as a whole brings out this aspect of a King's duty as the *Dasara* does. The King in celebrating it prays for the people; he prays with them; and he invokes the blessings of God for them and their happiness and prosperity during the days it lasts.

The evolution of the festival shows the changes which it has undergone. Celebrated for ages, it has been both a religious and a social festival and a festival too in which the family takes its own share. Originally a thanksgiving festival in honour of Indra, the God as much of war as of rain, it came to be regarded as signifying the day of victory for Rama and the Pandava brothers. It also became connected with the victories of Devi, the Divine Mother conceived of as the personification of energy in the abstract. She is spoken of

<sup>4</sup> *Sacred Laws of the Aryas* in the *S.B.E.*, II. 214 and 238; *Institutes of Vishnu* in the *S.B.E.*, XXV and LXXVIII. 307.

<sup>5</sup> *Gautama*, X. 48; *Asistha*, XV. 7-9.

as residing everywhere and in everything, in things small and in things great. She is the *Sakti*, without which none can function. Brahma, Vishnu and Siva have to depend for their success on her co-operation. Such is the power of the Divine Mother. The *Puranas* mention explicitly this aspect of her personality. The *Markandeya Purana*, for instance, in describing her supremacy as a deity and her position as the source of all divine as well as cosmic evolution, speaks of her in terms which show the all-important position she had come to occupy long before that work was composed. "The Guptarupa Devi, that is, the Devi who is unmanifested, takes the three forms of Lakshmi, Mahakali and Sarasvati representing the Rajasa, Sattvika and the Tamasa attributes or *gunas* of *prakriti*. She is also known in various other ways; for instance, at the time of *srishhti* or creation, she is *Mahakali* exercising control over Brahma and bringing the world into existence; at the time of the *pralaya* or universal destruction she is *Mahamari*; as giver of wealth and prosperity she is *Lakshmi* and as destroyer of wealth and prosperity *Alakshmi* or Jyeshtha Devi." The *Devi Mahatmya*, indeed, states that all the gods and goddesses are but manifestations of the one single Supreme Being Mahalakshmi and should not be understood to be separate individual deities. Mahalakshmi is thus seen to be the Supreme Source of all power. The Devi in this particular form accordingly became the basis of all worship of *Sakti*, the universal energy which is responsible for all creation. All her other forms are but her

different manifestations, which people, whether Saiva, Vaishnava or Sakta, revere and worship according to their ancestral faith. In the worship thus offered, the Devi's greater manifestations—the manifestations in which she is described to have done good to humanity, by the victories she won over the evil tormentors of humanity, diseases or pestilences—came to claim considerable prominence. In these more famous manifestations, further, her martial qualities and her anxiety to serve her devotees became evident and these qualities in particular received special attention at the time reverence was shown to her. It is thus that the forms in which she came to be represented and the attributes with which she was invested were evolved. It is no wonder she stands to-day the symbol of every kind of energy—of creative power, of conquest and of the consummation of great and meritorious deeds for the prosperity and happiness of mankind. She is ever at hand and always ready to come to the aid of humanity. The *Devi Mahatmya* again and again impresses on its readers the fact that when humanity is troubled, she incarnates for its good and for its deliverance. Such is the Devi according to the *Purana* devoted to her. The *Agamas* describe her as Durga taking nine different forms which together are spoken of as Nava-Durgas.<sup>6</sup> It is in these nine forms that she is specially invoked, each one day during the first nine days—*navaratri*—

<sup>6</sup> Nilakanthi, Kshemankari, Harasiddhi, Rudramsa Durga, Vana-Durga, Agni-Durga, Jaya-Durga, Vinudhya-Vasini Durga, and Ripumari-Durga

of the festival. In the first of her nine forms she is spoken of as the bestower of wealth and happiness ; in the second as the bringer of good health ; in the third as the granter of desired ends ; in the fourth as the fiery heroine who confers victory ; in the fifth as the goddess who blesses cattle with prosperity ; in the sixth as the deity who is welcomed as the successful warrior ; in the seventh as one who grants salvation ; in the eighth as the goddess who is the sovereign of the hills and dales ; and in the ninth as the goddess who is destruction to her enemies and their followers. The worship of these different forms of the Devi would thus mean the obtaining of the essentials of a happy and contented life both to Kings and to people, both in their individual and collective capacities. Her worship means relief from distress ; victory to arms ; peace and plenty to man and beast ; freedom from disease and pestilence ; the obtaining of all human aims and ends ; and even the attainment of salvation. No wonder that the festival is so popular and so universal all over India.

During the days of Hindu supremacy in the South represented by the Vijayanagar dynasty of Kings (14th to 16th centuries A.D.), occasion appears to have been taken to give even a political turn to the festival it being made the occasion for the tributary chiefs, provincial governors, and collectors of revenue repairing to the King's capital, and rendering homage, paying the tributes due, and generally helping towards the smooth governance of the Kingdom. The Mysore





DASARA PROCESSION IN FRONT OF THE FREEMASON'S HALL.



Kings, who inherited these traditions, as the successors of the *Vijayanagar Kings in this part of South India*, have probably been observing the feast in its most highly developed form. The truth of this remark will be evident when we compare what takes place to-day at Mysore during the period this festival lasts, with what has come down to us as contemporary accounts of the festival as it was celebrated during the palmiest days of Vijayanagar rule. It is possibly true that the festival has been popularized beyond all calculation by this methodic observance of it through the ages, so that even Muhammadans seem to have, unconsciously as it were, taken to it, as observed by the Abbe Dubois, in his writings. The prominent position occupied by the sovereign in it in Mysore is also, perhaps, due to the close connection that existed between it and the old Vijayanagar Kings quite apart from the religious aspect, which makes his position in it so important. However this may be, there is hardly any doubt that the strict observance of the festival in Mysore by the ruling King has contributed not a little to the prominence it gets as one of the greater national festivals observed in the State. Here, the King is the pivot round which the festival moves. He takes the vow for performing it; he observes the fast; he gives up his personal comforts and even neglects his personal appearance; he goes through the ritualism that forms part of it; and he welcomes the people that foregather at his palace every evening to obtain his blessings in the

shape of floral offerings taken from under the feet of the Goddess. He offers worship both for himself and for his subjects ; both for his own family and for the groups of families that go to make up his Kingdom ; and he obtains the blessings of the Devi both for himself and for those who look to him for protection. *Nā Vishnuḥ Prithvipatiḥ* : there is no King without (the attribute of) Vishnu being in him. That is, the King represents the God to his subjects : and in turn he represents his subjects before God. This is the *Sakti* represented by the Goddess, working in the invisible world brought into play for the good humanity into this visible world, and made to subserve human ends.

The *Padmapurana* says that the destruction of Mahishasura by the Devi is an allegorical representation of the fact that Wisdom personified—in the form of Devi—triumphed over Ignorance personified in the Mahishasura. This interpretation indicates that *Sakti* (as typified in the Devi) is not physical, but ethical, *i.e.*, one which sustains itself on knowledge. In this sense, the many incarnations of the Devi—in which she won victories over demons—typify only the repeated success of knowledge over ignorance, and of spirit over matter. The King in communion with the Devi imbibes her spirit and communicates it to his subjects, thus spreading culture throughout the circle of his influence. That seems the true significance of the ritualism of the feast and of the object aimed at by the King joining in its celebration. The worship of the arms, implements and books indicate that the Devi is active in her

different activities in the cosmic sphere. Her *Sakti* can destroy what is evil ; can create what is good ; and can bless humanity with the four ultimate aims which it craves for—*dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha*, i.e., discharging one's duty rightfully by one's kind ; acquisition of wealth for a just use of it ; fulfilment of all desires for the good of oneself and others ; and lastly, the attaining of salvation as the result of one's own selfless deeds. The worship of the Devi, possessed of such *Sakti*, means the worship of herself and all her manifestations, small and great, there being no difference whatever between them or between the powers manifest in them. Her *Sakti* is one and indivisible as she is herself one and indivisible. Her worship means the attainment of everything that can be acquired by the practice of the four different paths of devotion mentioned in the Hindu Scriptures, viz., *Raja Yoga*, *Bhakti Yoga*, *Karma Yoga* and *Jnana Yoga*. If she is terrible sometimes, she is so only to the wicked and the bad ; and if she is like a warrior at times, she is so only to accomplish high aims and ends ; if she is on occasions spoken of as riding a lion or a chariot driven by as many as four lions, she is so spoken of only to show her sovereign power over all creation ; and if she is represented as black in colour she is so represented only to show that she is the deliverer from everything that is fearsome or associated with what inspires fear. She is, in a word, the creator, the preserver and the destroyer and it is by virtue of her *Sakti* that Brahma, Vishnu and Siva carry on their respective duties in the cosmic plane.

## THE DASARA IN MYSORE

In the light of the allegorical interpretation put forth in the *Padmapurana*, it is perhaps permissible to suggest that the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* which are connected with the festival are capable of being interpreted in a spiritual sense. Such spiritual interpretations (technically called *Adhyatmika*<sup>7</sup>) have indeed been propounded for them. According to these interpretations, the epics typify the struggle that is ever going on in the cosmos and the manner in which the spirit of humanity is working out its own evolution. It is the Supreme Spirit under whose providence humanity moves and has its being that is invoked by king, priest and subject at this great feast and it is that Supreme Spirit that is prayed to and adored, for the uninterrupted progress of humanity during the period it lasts. The victory is signified by the festivities of the tenth day, fittingly styled the Day of Victory—the Victory of man over the baser elements, of knowledge over ignorance and of spirit over matter. That is the significance of the *Dasara*, a festival that typifies India's steadfast belief in the eternality of *Dharma*.

Lofty beyond all thought, unperishing;  
Thou treasure-house Supreme, all-immanent;  
Eternal Dharma's changeless Guardian, Thou;  
As immemorial Man I think of Thee.

*Bhagavad Gita*, XI. 18.

<sup>7</sup> *Atmanam adhikrityabhavat* : Relating to the Supreme Spirit.



THE DASARA PROCESSION TO THE BANNI-MANTAP WITH H. H. THE MAHARAJA RIDING THE ELEPHANT





## APPENDIX I.

### The Sami Tree.

ABOUT the *Sami* tree, which is referred to in several of the chapters of this book, it is worth noting here that it is a prickly tree, with an eatable pod. It is botanically the *Prosopis spicigera* of Linnaeus; the *Mimos*a (*Acacia*) *Suma* of Roxburgh. It is from the wood of this tree that Brahman priests generate fire by friction for the performance of sacrifices. It is also known by the alternative names of *Jambi* and *Banhi* or *Banni*. Sanskrit poets love to speak of it as the *fire-tree*, as it is said to contain fire. Hence the name *Banhi* (or *Vahni*, fire) given to it. It is also known as the *Saktiphali* or *Saktiphala*, the tree which contains or grants *Sakti*, i.e., the tree whose worship imparts power to the devotee. Fire is regarded as a symbol of energy. It is to a thick bough of this tree that the Pandava brothers tied up their arms and took them back for use, at the end of the thirteen<sup>th</sup> year of *incognito* service under the King of Virata, identified by some with modern Berar.\* *Sami* is thus identified

\* They were tied up in such a way that nobody—neither Rakshasas, nor men, nor beasts, nor spirits—can approach the bundle containing them. They were tied up by Arjuna assisted by Sahadeva so securely that neither heat nor cold nor even the rains could affect the arms; even the frequenters of forests would not be attracted to them from the peculiar smell emitting from the bundle. (For a description, see *Virata Parva*, VII, 56-47, Krishnamacharya's edition, page 13.)

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with *Sakti*, the chief attribute of Durga and hence her worship of nine days ends appropriately with the attribute of her most important attribute. The dedication of certain trees to certain deities is well known in India. The following table shows a few of these :—

No.	Tree or Plant	Deity dedicated to	Day and month for worship
1	Aswatha	Trimurtis	Monday on which the Amavasya falls.
2	Tulasi	Lakshmi	Kartika Suddha Pour- nima and Kartika Suddha Dwadasi.
3	Arka ( <i>Ekke</i> )	Surya	Rathasaptami (Magha Suddha Saptami).
4	Vi-shnukranti	Vishnu	Rishipanchami.
5	Ala and Atti	Saraswati	Anantachaturdasi (Bhadra pada Suddha Chaturdasi)
6	Nelli or Amalaka	Dhatri (Earth)	Kartika Suddha Pour- nima.
7	Garika	Ganesha	Bhadrpada Suddha Chauti.
8	Sami	Durga	Vijayadasami.

Likewise the *Navagrahas* or the nine planets have each a plant dedicated to them and their products are associated with their *pujas*.

## APPENDIX II.

### Sri Chakra.

THE Sakti in man, called *Kundalinisakti*, is developed, it would seem, successively through six centres. According to the *Yogasastras*, this Sakti can help towards *moksha* or the liberation of the Soul. The effect produced by its development is not infrequently depicted diagrammatically. These diagrams are called *chakras* and *yantras*. A *chakra* consists of angles and petal-like parts; that which consists of angles alone is called a *yantra*. *Yantras* generally consist of triangles cutting each other or straight lines crossing each other so as to produce a number of rectangular spaces and terminating in trident-like projections. Certain letters called *bijaksharas* or seed-letters are associated with these *chakras* and *yantras* and are written down invariably in specified parts of its surface. The *bijaksharas* may be taken to be something like code words whose significance is known only to the initiates. Perhaps the most important of the *yantras* is the *Sri Chakra*. It generally consists of forty-three triangles interestingly arranged in a plane and may also be in three other forms technically called the *Meru*, the *Kailasa* and the *Bhu*. These *yantras* are generally engraved on some metallic plates—gold, silver or copper and worshipped; often they are buried, next to the *Balipitha*, in shrines which are known as

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*Sakti-pithalayas*, and worship is offered to them twice daily. Other *yantras* are engraved on thin gold, silver or copper plates, and rolled into a cylinder and then put into a golden or other metallic case and worn on the body by those who desire to avoid diseases, possession by evil spirits, etc., which they have power to ward off. (For a drawing of the *Sri Chakra*, see *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, by T. A. Gopinatha Rao, I, (ii), Plates XCVII and XCVIII.)









